



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Idaho Division of Health

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MOLD IN OUR HOMES

What is mold?

Molds are simple microscopic fungi that can be found virtually everywhere. Molds need a moist environment to thrive. Outdoors, molds can be found in shady, damp areas or where leaves or other plants are rotting. Indoors, they can be found in areas where the relative humidity is higher, such as basements, closets, windows, or showers. Moisture sources for mold growth include flooding, breathing, bathing, cooking, laundry, fish tanks, backed-up sewers, leaky roofs and windows, humidifiers, damp basements, continuous plumbing leaks, plants, and non-vented burning appliances (clothes dryers, ovens, stoves, water heaters, ranges).

Molds give off tiny, lightweight particles, called spores, which can travel through the air and settle where the air is calm. Some of the particles may stay airborne, exposing inhabitants throughout the entire house. Molds come in different shapes and sizes and range in color from white, orange, green, brown, and black.

How can you tell if you have a mold problem?

If you can see mold or smell an earthy or musty odor, you probably have a moisture and mold problem. Look for water damage on porous materials (materials through which water can easily pass, such as ceiling tiles, sheetrock, plaster, wood products, carpet/carpet pad).

visible mold growth is often found underneath materials where water has damaged surfaces or behind walls. Look for discoloration and leaching from plaster.

New houses are not immune to mold problems nor are regions of the country considered to have dry climates.

Should you have your home tested for mold?

Testing your home for mold can be very expensive; therefore, testing is **not** generally recommended. However, if you decide you would like to have your home tested, it is recommended that you hire a trained and experienced environmental consultant to do the sampling. Check references and ask how results of the test will benefit you. If you already know you have mold, spend the time and money on cleanup rather than testing.

What are the health effects of mold?

Mold in your home could be causing more problems than just an unpleasant odor. Molds can cause allergic reactions similar to those caused by plant pollen (nasal stuffiness, eye irritation, sore throat, coughing, tightness in the chest, or wheezing among sensitive people). Symptoms usually disappear soon after the exposure ends without causing long-term effects. Exposure can also occur through skin contact or ingestion. Individuals most affected by mold include infants, elderly,

immune compromised (those with HIV infection, liver disease, or undergoing chemotherapy), pregnant women, and people with respiratory problems, such as allergies and asthma.

Some molds have more toxic health effects than others, depending on the specific toxin, the amount of exposure, and the route of exposure. However, the basic rule still applies, “if you can see mold or smell it” take steps to correct the moisture problem and cleanup and remove the mold.

How do you prevent mold problems?

The best way to prevent mold growth is to identify the moisture source and correct it.

Specific Recommendations:

- * Keep the house dry, especially in damp areas like the bathroom or the basement. Use bathroom ceiling fans when showering or bathing.
- * Look for leaky pipes, clogged drains, or bad water drainage systems beneath the ground surrounding your home.
- * Be sure your home has adequate ventilation, including exhaust fans in the kitchen and bathrooms.
- * Vent your clothes dryer to the outside.
- * Avoid carpeting bathrooms and basements; use area rugs instead.
- * Remove or replace previously soaked carpets and upholstery that have not dried out within 48 hours.
- * Paint walls with a brand that contains a fungicide. Ventilate well when using these paints.
- * Use an air conditioner or a dehumidifier during humid months. Ensure that they are drained properly and maintained according to manufacturers’ recommendations.
- * Place a plastic cover over dirt in crawl spaces to prevent moisture from coming in from the ground. Be sure crawl spaces are well ventilated.

How do you clean and remove mold from your home?

Occupants can be exposed to high levels of mold particles during the cleaning process. This is especially true for the individual doing

the cleaning. Cleaning stirs the air causing molds to become airborne. When cleaning, you should wear eye protection, a respirator or mask, rubber gloves, and clothing that can be laundered or discarded after use. Be sure the area is well ventilated when using cleaning solutions.



Mold on wall.

After the moisture source has been identified and corrected, you must clean and dry the area **within 24 to 48 hours**. Remove and throw out porous materials. For non-porous surfaces such as cement floors, windows, and counter tops, use a non-ammonia soap/detergent and hot water or a commercial cleaner. Thoroughly scrub all contaminated surfaces. Rinse clean with water. After cleaning, apply a disinfectant solution such as household bleach (1/4 cup bleach per gallon of water) to the surface. Use a wet-dry vacuum to collect extra bleach solution. Allow the bleach solution to dry naturally for 6 to 8 hours. If you have a persistent mold problem, cleaning and disinfecting may have to be repeated using a stronger solution.

Note: Disturbing molds during the clean-up process can spread mold spores throughout the home. Thoroughly wet all areas of suspected contamination to reduce the spreading.

How can you get more information?

For more information on mold and other indoor air pollutants, contact the Idaho Indoor Environment Program toll-free at 1-800-445-8647, or the IAQ Information Clearinghouse at 1-800-438-4318.